

10/563123

- 1 -

IAP20 Rec'd PGT/PTO 03 JAN 2006

INFORMATION PROCESSING APPARATUS, SOFTWARE UPDATING SYSTEM,  
METHOD OF UPDATING SOFTWARE AND PROGRAM THEREOF

FIELD OF TECHNOLOGY

5 [0001]

The present invention relates to an information processing apparatus capable of updating software that is used by users, method of updating the software and program thereof.

10 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002]

In a system that a computer of a user (user computer), a computer of a service provider (center computer) and a computer of a software vender (software vendor) are capable of communicating with each other, conventional technology for updating software of the user computer is, for example, that the center computer has a data base necessary for updating software installed in the user computer and the user installs data such as a part of the database. Then the user judges which of the update software to be obtained by exchanging data with the center computer. Having determined the software to be installed, the user receives information on URL (Uniform Resource Locator) of the software vendor from the center computer and using the information on URL, the user installs update software from a computer (site) of the software vendor.

[Patent Literature 1] Japanese laid-open patent

application publication 10-91407 (paragraph [0027], [0028],  
[0029], [0030], [0031], [0032], [0033], [0034] and [0035],  
Fig.2 and so on.

#### DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

##### 5 PROBLEMS TO BE SOLFVED

[0003]

However, in the technology recited in the patent  
literature 1 mentioned above, a large size database for  
maintaining information on software is necessary to be  
10 provided in the both of the center computer and the user  
computer. (See claim 4)

Furthermore, even when the software is judged to be  
updated, the center computer simply informs the URL of the  
site of the software vendor where the update software is  
15 stored, which means that the center computer always has to  
check whether the URL of the software vendor still exists.  
(See paragraph [0044] etc).

[0004]

In addition, the center computer stores all of the  
20 information on various kinds of software installed in a  
plurality of user computers regardless of kinds of software  
actually installed in each user computer. Therefore, each  
of the user computers must obtain information on names of  
software that is actually installed therein from all of the  
25 information on various kinds of software first, every time  
when judging which software to be obtained. (See paragraph  
[0064], [0065], [0066], [0067], [0068], [0069], [0070] and

[0071] etc) In other words, since the database of the center computer does not correspond to each of the user computer, each user computer has to choose information that is necessary for itself from the large amount of data.

5 [0005]

Furthermore, at least five times of exchanging of data between the user computer and the center computer, namely, (1) synchronization of the tables installed in both computers, (2) sending and receiving of IDs for updating software, (3) returning information on IDs for updating software, (4) sending and receiving of records and (5) accessing to the site of the software vendors has to occur until the software is eventually updated in the user computer, which leads to congestion in network traffic and could become a cause for delay. (See paragraph [0065], [0066], [0067], [0068], [0069], [0070], [0071], [0072], [0073], [0074] and [0075] etc)

15 [0006]

The present invention is made under such circumstance, and the object thereof is to provide an information processing apparatus capable of reducing load both of the software vendor side and the user side and updating software easily and, in the same time, efficiently, a system for updating software, method of updating software and the program thereof.

25

MEANS FOR SOLVING THE PROBLEM

[0007]

In order to solve the above-mentioned problem, an information processing apparatus of the present invention comprises, sending means for sending a user identification information for identifying a user using the information processing apparatus to the center computer, first  
5 obtaining means for obtaining from the center computer a plurality of location informations indicating locations of a plurality of storing regions that correspond to the user identification information sent by the sending means, out  
10 of a plurality of storing regions storing the plurality of update softwares for a plurality of softwares provided by a plurality of software vendors to the plurality of users such that the plurality of update softwares are made to correspond to the user identification information of each  
15 of a plurality of users, second obtaining means for obtaining a plurality of lists of the plurality of update softwares by accessing to the plurality of storing regions storing the plurality of update softwares according to the plurality of location informations obtained by the first obtaining  
20 means; judging means for judging whether there is any update softwares to be obtained by comparing the obtained list and the softwares currently being installed in the information processing apparatus, and third obtaining means, when the judging means judges that there are some update softwares  
25 to be obtained, for obtaining the update softwares by accessing to each of the storing regions storing the update softwares for each of the software judged to be updated

according to each of the obtained location informations.

[0008]

Here, the storing region storing update softwares may be located at any place in the network as long as the storing region is capable of communicating with the above-mentioned center computer and the user computer. In addition, the location information on the storing region storing update softwares is, for example, a URL (Uniform resource Locator).

[0009]

According to this configuration, since the storing region storing the update software corresponds to the user identification information (User ID) of the user computer, the user computer is only to obtain location information on the storing region storing update softwares from the center computer. Then the user computer obtains the update software easily and precisely without relying on the center computer by obtaining the list of update softwares stored in the storing region storing update softwares according to the location information, judging the necessity of obtaining updates, and accessing to the storing region storing update softwares.

[0010]

In addition, the exchange of information with the center computer is limited to the sending of a User ID and corresponding location information and, since the storing region storing update softwares does not correspond to each user of the information processing apparatus, traffic

congestion or delay in the network can be minimized.

[0011]

Furthermore, the whole process of obtaining update softwares, starting from judging the necessity for update  
5 until obtaining the necessary updates can be automated.

[0012]

According to the information processing apparatus described as above, the update softwares are modules for updating softwares currently being installed in a plurality  
10 of the information processing apparatuses of the plurality of users that are made to correspond to the plurality of storing regions storing the update softwares, and the judging means has means for comparing the list of modules obtained from the storing regions storing the update  
15 softwares and the modules that are currently being installed in the information processing apparatus and forming a list of newer versions of the modules than the modules currently being installed in the information processing apparatus out of the list of modules obtained from the storing regions  
20 storing the update softwares and means for presenting the formed list to the user and inputting a command to obtain the newer version of the modules, and the second obtaining means may obtain the newer version of the modules when the command to obtain the newer version thereof is inputted.

25 [0013]

In addition, according to the information processing apparatus described as above, the update softwares are

modules for currently not being installed and to be added  
in the information processing apparatus of the plurality  
of users that are made to correspond to the storing regions  
storing the update softwares and, the judging means has means  
5 for comparing the list of modules obtained from the storing  
regions storing the update softwares and the modules that  
are currently being installed in the information processing  
apparatus, and forming a list of modules that are currently  
not being installed in the information processing apparatus  
10 and means for presenting the formed list to the users and  
inputting a command to obtain the modules currently not being  
installed and, the second obtaining means obtains the  
modules currently not being installed in the information  
processing apparatus when the command to obtain the modules  
15 currently not being installed is inputted.

[0014]

Here, "inputting the command to obtain the modules"  
includes not only when, for example, the user presses  
"obtain" button shown on the screen as GUI (Graphical User  
20 Interface) such as an icon but also when a timer reaches  
its set hours to obtain modules after the user set the timer.

[0015]

With this configuration, the necessity of the software  
to be updated can be informed easily to the user by presenting  
25 the list of new versions of modules and the list of deficient  
modules. Furthermore, since the new versions of modules and  
deficient modules are obtained according to the "obtain"

command described as above, the software can be prevented from being updated against the intention of the user.

[0016]

According to the information processing apparatus described as above, the information processing apparatus further comprises means for accessing to the storing regions storing update softwares and obtains a list of modules again by accessing to the storing regions storing the update softwares according to the obtained location information when the command to obtain the modules is inputted and means for re-forming the list of the newer version of modules according to the list obtained again, and the second obtaining means may obtain the newer version of the modules according to the re-formed list of modules.

[0017]

According to this configuration, since the list of modules to be obtained is formed again by accessing to the software storing region after the transmission of the command to obtain the modules, for example, the update software added to the software storing region by the time the user transmits "obtain" command can be obtained. This enables real-time and complete update of the software.

[0018]

Meanwhile, as the information processing apparatus updates the software, there may be a case where the updated software has an effect on other software used by the user causing the unstable performance of the other software. In



such a case, it is difficult for a user who does not have knowledge of an expert to previously judge or foresee such effects and to stop updating his/her software when the update software does have a harmful effect on the existing software.

5 [0019]

For this reason, the information processing apparatus described above further comprises, means for previously storing a name of the software that is being excluded from the judgment of judging whether there are any update  
10 softwares to be obtained and means for restricting updating softwares according to the stored names of the software.  
[0020]

Here, "a name of the software that is being excluded from the judgment of judging" means, for example, software  
15 that may have a harmful effect. With this configuration, the user can update his/her software without worrying the effect that the update software may have on the other softwares of his/her own. Even when there is update software that will have harmful effect, the updating such  
20 software may be restricted beforehand.  
[0021]

The information processing apparatus as described above is capable of communicating with a link machine as a master machine through the network and has means for having  
25 the link machine compare the list of modules of the update softwares obtained from the storing regions and the modules that is currently being installed in the information

processing apparatus and judge whether there are any update  
softwares to be obtained, and when there are some update  
softwares judged to be obtained, access to storing region  
for each of the software judged to be obtained according  
5 to each of the obtained location informations and obtain  
the necessary update softwares from the storing regions  
storing the update softwares.

[0022]

Here, apart from a small-scale network such as LAN,  
10 the network includes, for example, WAN (Wide Area Network),  
the internet and the like.

[0023]

With this configuration, software installed in all the  
other link machines can be updated at once as the information  
15 processing apparatus triggers the action to obtain update  
softwares to the other link machines when being connected  
thereto. In addition, the information processing  
apparatus becomes a trigger for updating the link machines  
but the information processing apparatus does not send the  
20 update software itself to the link machines, the load on  
the information processing apparatus can be minimized.

[0024]

A system for updating software of present invention  
in a system where a center computer and an information  
25 processing apparatus of a user is capable of communicating  
through a network, the center computer has means for  
previously putting away update softwares for a plurality

of softwares provided to a plurality of users by a plurality of software vendors in a plurality of storing regions storing a plurality of update softwares that are provided on the network so that each of the storing regions corresponds to each of a plurality of location informations indicating a location of each of the plurality of storing regions for each of the update softwares and a plurality of user identification informations of each of the plurality of users, a receiving means for receiving the user identification information from the information processing apparatus and referencing means for having the information processing apparatus refer to the location information of the storing regions for update softwares that corresponds to the user identification information when the user identification information is received by the referencing means, and the information processing apparatus of the user has sending means for sending the user identification information to the center computer, a first obtaining means for obtaining a plurality of location informations indicating locations of a plurality of storing regions that corresponds to the user identification information sent by the sending means, second obtaining means for obtaining a plurality of lists of the plurality of update softwares by accessing to the plurality of storing regions storing the plurality of update softwares according to the plurality of location informations obtained by the first obtaining means, judging means for judging whether there is any update

softwares to be obtained by comparing the obtained list and the softwares currently being installed in the information processing apparatus and third obtaining means, when the judging means judges that there are some update softwares to be obtained, for obtaining the update softwares by accessing to each of the storing regions storing the update softwares for each of the software judged to be updated according to each of the obtained location informations. [0025]

10           With such configuration, the center computer is only to have the User IDs correspond to the location informations of the storing regions and is not necessary to maintain information on update software for each one of the users. This leads to reducing of maintenance and communication load imposed in the whole system to a considerable extent. [0026]

20           In addition, the information processing apparatus on the user side also only has to send its User ID to obtain the location informations of the storing regions storing the update softwares necessary for updating softwares installed therein. Therefore, the information processing apparatus can have its software updated easily by accessing to the storing regions without relying on processing by the center computer.

25           [0027]

Furthermore, the software vendor is only to have the center computer put the update software in the storing region

storing update softwares, then the update software is provided to the user easily by the processing of the center computer and the information processing apparatus on the user side.

5 [0028]

In addition, the exchange of information between the center computer and the information processing apparatus on the user side and between the information apparatus and the storing region can be finished with a minimum number of once or two times respectively, traffic congestion or  
10 delay in the network can be prevented at a minimum rate.  
[0029]

In other words, the software of the user can be updated easily and efficiently and the load imposed on the center  
15 computer, the information processing apparatus on the user side and the software vendor can be reduced in the same time.  
[0030]

According to the system for updating software described above, the center computer may have means for  
20 receiving update software from the software vendor, add the software to the storing region storing update softwares and have the list of update softwares stored in the storing region storing the update software renewed.  
[0031]

25 With such system, every time the software vendor sends the update software they provide to the center computer, the center computer, without fail, adds the update software

into the storing region storing update software and renews the list of update softwares, the center computer and the software vendor can always provide the user with the current update softwares.

5 [0032]

According to the system for updating software described above, the center computer may further have a predetermined means for noticing the information processing apparatus on the user side when new update software is added to the storing region storing update softwares.

[0033]

Here, the predetermined means for informing is, for example, a notice sent via e-mail. This configuration enables the user to know immediately of the current update software provided by the software vendors and to update the software upon the receipt of the above-mentioned notice.

[0034]

According to the system for updating software described above, the plurality of storing regions storing the update softwares are provided for each of the plurality of software vendors and the means for putting the plurality of update softwares to the plurality of storing regions for update softwares by each of a plurality of different softwares provided by each of the plurality of software vendors so that each of the plurality of software updates corresponds each of the plurality of location informations for each of the update softwares, each of the plurality of

user identification informations and the first obtaining means may obtain each of the location informations for each of the software storing regions storing update softwares corresponding to the user identification information, and the second obtaining means and the third obtaining means may access to each of the plurality of storing regions storing update softwares according to each of the plurality of location informations.

[0035]

With this configuration, in a case where the software vendor provides a plurality of different softwares, the maintenance of the update softwares becomes easier by having each of the softwares stored individually into each of the storing regions storing update software. In the same time, since the plurality of storing regions storing update software corresponds with user ID of the information processing apparatus on the user side, the software can be updated quite easily without any complicated process so long as the location information of the storing region storing update software is received.

[0036]

According to the system for updating software described above, the means for previously putting the plurality of update softwares in the plurality of storing regions storing update softwares so that a combination or a plurality of combinations out of the different softwares provided by the plurality of software vendors may correspond

to the plurality of location informations of each of the plurality of storing regions for each of the update softwares and the user identification information of each of the plurality of users.

5 [0037]

With this configuration, even when the user is using different softwares provided by a plurality of different software vendors, the different softwares are all stored as a group of software in the storing region storing the update software. Therefore, the information processing apparatus on the user side can obtain update software necessary to its own at once by accessing to the storing region storing update software.

[0038]

15 A method of updating a software installed in an information processing apparatus capable of communication with a center computer through a network of the present invention comprises, sending an user identification information for identifying an user using the information processing apparatus to the center computer, obtaining from 20 the center computer a plurality of location informations indicating locations of a plurality of storing regions that correspond to the user identification information sent by the sending means, out of a plurality of storing regions storing the plurality of update softwares for a plurality 25 of softwares provided by a plurality of software vendors to the plurality of users such that the plurality of update



softwares are made to correspond to the user identification information of each of a plurality of users, accessing to the plurality of storing regions for update softwares according to the received plurality of location

5 informations and obtaining a plurality of lists of software to be updated from the plurality of storing regions storing update softwares, judging whether there are any update softwares to be obtained by comparing the list of the update softwares and the softwares currently being installed in

10 the information processing apparatus, and obtaining necessary update softwares from the storing regions storing update softwares for each of the software judged to be obtained by accessing to each of the storing regions storing update softwares according to the location information when

15 there is an update software judged to be obtained.

[0039]

Meanwhile, a program for causing an information processing apparatus capable of communicating with a center computer through a network to execute a processing comprises,

20 a sending step for sending an user identification information for identifying an user using the information processing apparatus to the center computer, an obtaining step for obtaining from the center computer a plurality of location informations indicating locations of a plurality

25 of storing regions that correspond to the user identification information sent by the sending means, out of a plurality of storing regions storing the plurality of

update softwares for a plurality of softwares provided by  
a plurality of software vendors to the plurality of users  
such that the plurality of update softwares are made to  
correspond to the user identification information of each  
5 of a plurality of users, an accessing step for accessing  
to the plurality of storing regions for update softwares  
according to the received plurality of location  
informations and obtaining a plurality of lists of software  
to be updated from the plurality of storing regions storing  
10 update softwares, a judging step for judging whether there  
are any update softwares to be obtained by comparing the  
list of the update softwares and the softwares currently  
being installed in the information processing apparatus,  
and an obtaining step for obtaining necessary update  
15 softwares from the storing regions storing update softwares  
for each of the software judged to be obtained by accessing  
to each of the storing regions storing update softwares  
according to the location information when there is an update  
software judged to be obtained.

20 BEST MODE OF CARRING OUT THE INVENTION  
[0040]

Embodiments of the present invention is explained as  
below.

[0041]

25 FIG. 1 is a sectional view showing overall structure  
of a container according to an embodiment of the present  
invention.

[0042]

As shown in the diagram, for example, network 101 such as internet and LAN (Local Area Network), center computer 102, a plurality of user computers 103 and a plurality of module storing regions 104 that stores modules as software updates are connected. The center computer 102, the user computers 103 and the module storing regions 104 are capable of communicating with each other through the internet.

[0043]

The number of the user computers 103 and the module storing regions 104 can be anything so long as they are capable of being connected with the center computer 102. In addition, a topology that the user computers 103 is connected with the center computer 102 and the module storing regions 104 may be, for example, company LAN being connected to the internet. The form of connection may also be a computer of a remote branch office or a computer of a company run by a private individual and the like working so called as SOHO (Small Office / Home Office) connected to a computer in the head office through the internet.

[0044]

FIG. 2 is a diagram showing a structure of the center computer 102.

[0045]

The center computer 102 is comprised of a CPU (Central Processing Unit) 201, a communication portion 204 for communication through the network 101 and a data storing

portion 205 that stores various kinds of data and the like  
all connected with each other through a bus 206.

[0046]

The data storing portion 205 stores a licensing table  
5 205a, a table for locating modules to be obtained 205b and  
the table for information on the module storing region 205c.

[0047]

FIG.3 is a diagram showing the contents of the  
licensing table 205a, the table for locating modules to be  
10 obtained 205b and the table for information on the module  
storing region 205c.

[0048]

As shown in FIG.3, the licensing table 205a stores  
license information such as user ID of the individual user  
15 for identifying user of each of the user computers, an IP  
address and a domain name as a unique key for the individual  
user. The licensing table 205a exists in the same number  
as the number of the user computers 103.

[0049]

20 The table for locating modules to be obtained 205b  
contains user ID and URL indicating location of the module  
storing regions 104 on the network 101 that corresponds with  
the user ID. Since the module storing regions 104 exists  
in a plurality of numbers and the plurality of storing  
25 regions can be made to correspond to a single user ID, the  
user ID is regarded as a duplicatable key in the table. This  
means that a plurality of URLs for different module storing

regions may be stored as being made to correspond to the same user ID.

[0050]

Further, regarding the table for locating modules to be obtained 205b, the table exists in the same number as the number of different module storing regions 104 that are made to correspond with the same user ID. The table is provided for each one of the plurality of the user IDs. Details of the module storing regions 104 will be described later.

[0051]

In the table for information on the module storing region 205c, URLs and types of the module storing regions and an unlocking keys are stored as unique keys.

[0052]

The type of the module storing region indicates what types of modules that the module storing region should store. In other words, types of modules indicates whether the module storing region store the latest version of modules that are the modules being made some changed to the current version of modules (hereinafter called as "the changed modules") or the modules that are to be added to the current version of modules without changing the current modules (hereinafter called "the added modules"), or whether the module storing region is made to correspond to a region storing modules called a "skip module" which will be described later. In addition, the unlocking key is a key

that unlocks the module storing region when the user computer 103 accesses the storing region in a case where the region is locked.

[0053]

5           The table for information on the module storing region 205c exists in the same number as the number of the module storing regions that are connected to the center computer 102.

[0054]

10           The licensing table 205a and table for locating modules to be obtained 205b are made to relate with each other with the user IDs. The table for locating modules to be obtained 205b and the table for information on the module storing region 205c are made to relate with each other with  
15           the URLs for module storing regions. Consequently, all of the three tables are made to relate with each other. Further, the user computer 103 is able to obtain URLs for each of the module storing region, types of the module storing region and the unlocking keys by referring to the table for locating  
20           modules to be obtained 205b and table for information on the module storing region 205c.

[0055]

          In addition, though not shown in the diagram, the center computer may have data such as the name of each  
25           software vendors and the name of each softwares apart from the data stored in the above-mentioned three tables.

[0056]

FIG. 4 is a diagram showing a structure of the module storing region 104.

[0057]

As indicated in the diagram, a plurality of module storing regions 104-1, 104-2 and 104-3 are connected to the network 101. Each of the regions is divided into several sections indicated as 104-1b, 104-2a, 104-2b and the like. Furthermore, as described above, the number of the module storing portion 104 is not limited to three as indicated in the diagram.

[0058]

Modules 302a, 302b etc for updating software sent to the center computer 102 by the software vendors are stored in each of the module storing regions 104. Meanwhile, a list of modules 301 is stored in the center computer 102. The modules 302 may be, for example, patches for the security hole. Name of the modules and the version information on the modules are written in the above-mentioned list of module 301. Furthermore, as described above, each of the regions are categorized according to its types, namely, regions for storing the changed modules or regions for storing the added modules. The region is also categorized according to types on whether or not it corresponds to the region of skipped modules that will be described later.

[0059]

As a mode of utilizing each of the module storing regions 104, modules may be stored in such order that modules

for the software provided by a software vendor A is stored in the region 104-1a and modules for the software provided by a software vendor B is stored in the region 104-1b.

[0060]

5           In addition, in a case where one software vendor provides a plurality of different types of softwares, for example, the software vendor A provides three different softwares A, B and C, the software vendor B provides two different softwares D and E, each module of different  
10           softwares may be stored such that 104-1a of the module storing region 104-1 stores module of the software A provided by the software vendor A, the region 104-1b of the software vendor B stores modules of the software D. The region 104-2a of the module storing region 104-2 may store module of  
15           software B, the region 104-2b may store module of software E, region 104-3a of the module storing region 104-3 may store module of software C. In other words, modules can be stored for each of the different softwares provided by each of the software vendors. In this configuration, each of the  
20           software vendors is able to use different module storing regions, for example, for its OS (Operating System) and application softwares, or different regions can be used for each of the plurality of application softwares.

[0061]

25           Moreover, in a case where one user uses software A among the software A, B and C provided by the software vendor A, another user uses software A and B and yet other user



uses all of the softwares A, B and C, for example, modules may be stored for every combination of the softwares of the users, namely, module for the software A may be stored in the region 104-1a, module for the softwares A and B may be stored in the region 104-1b and the module for the software A, B and C may be stored in the region 104-3a.

[0062]

Furthermore, even for the modules of the software that are not of the software vendors, for example, in a case where one user uses software A provided by the software vendor A and software D provided by the software vendor B and software G provided by the software vendor C, the softwares A, D and G provided by different software vendors can be stored in the same storing region, according to the combination of the softwares used by the user.

[0063]

This facilitates maintenance of the software for each of the users and the user computer 103 can obtain modules to be updated that correspond to its combination of software at once by accessing to the module storing region 104.

[0064]

For any mode of utilization mentioned above, each of the module storing regions is allocated with an URL of the module storing region and made to correspond to the user IDs. Each of the software vendors, when providing new modules to be updated for the software that they offer, for example, sends modules out to the center computer 102 and

the center computer 102 designates the module storing region 104 for the modules to be stored, for example, by having them relate by the names of the softwares and the like. The module is stored in the designated module storing region and in the same time, the module list 301 is also updated.  
[0065]

However, the software vendor may add the modules to be changed directly to the module storing region 104 without intervention of the center computer 102. In such case, the module-storing region may be set to automatically update the module list 301 when a new module is stored in the module-storing region 104.  
[0066]

Furthermore, the module-storing region 104 may take a form that the center computer side leases to the software vendors. The software vendors can use the module-storing region 104 during the leasing period set by a lease contract with the center computer side.  
[0067]

FIG. 5 is a diagram showing a structure of the user computer 103. In the diagram, the user computer 103a, 103b and 103c forming a network as being connected to, for example, LAN 101 in a company. The number of user computers that forms the network is not limited to this particular number, however, any number of computers can be connected thereto so long as they are capable of communicating with each other.  
[0068]

Further, in the diagram, each of the user computers 103 are so-called a server-type computer, and offers its own function and data to a number of client computers connected to LAN 101 (not shown). Updating of the software for each of the user computers is supposed to be managed by, for example, a system manager that manages computer system inside the company.

[0069]

As indicated in the diagram, the user computer 103a is comprised of CPU 401, communication portion 404 and software storing portion 407 and they are all connected with a bus 409.

[0070]

FIG. 6 is a diagram showing a structure of the software stored in the software storing portion 407 and detailed structure of the data storing portion 408.

[0071]

As shown in FIG.6A, the software storing portion stores OS 411, update support tool 410 for updating software installed in the user computer 103 in the present embodiment and software of various kinds of application program (AP) 409a, 409b and 409c. The OS 411 and the application programs 409 are comprised of a plurality of modules that are subject to being updated. Further, API (Application Program Interface) 412 is built into OS 411 as a common interface so that various data can be exchanged between the user computer 103a and user computer 103b, 103c and any other

user computers 103.

[0072]

In addition, as shown in FIG6B, an IP address of the user computer 103a, user ID for being connected with the center computer 102, names of skipped module and IP address of the link machine are stored in the data storing portion 408.

[0073]

The name of skipped module is a name of a module that, when obtained, might have effect on the operation of other software. The user computer 103a can cancel the obtaining of the skipped module by referring to the names thereof. Details of the canceling process will be described later.

[0074]

The IP address of the link machine is address of the other user computers 103b and 103c and the like. The user computer 103a that functions as a master machine needs the IP address of the link machine in order to have the other user computers 103b and 103c start up linking with the master machine and obtain the modules to be updated. This process of start up linking with the user computer will also be described later.

[0075]

In addition, as shown in FIG. 5, operating portion 405 and a monitor 406 is connected to the user computer 103a. The operating portion 405 is structured, for example, by a key boards, mouse, a touch pad and the like. The operating

portion 405 functions as a user interface when the system operator installs software to be updated using the update support tool 410 and inputs various kinds of data in a set-up operation. Further, the update support tool 410 displays  
5 an update operation managing screen (not shown) on the monitor 406 when installing the modules to be updated or, in the set-up operation, the system manager performs various kinds of operation process on the screen using the operating portion 405. In addition, the operating portion 405 and the  
10 monitor 406 may locate at a position physically away from the user computer 103a and other user computers so long as they are connected with each other.  
[0076]

Next, an operation that the user computer 103 obtains  
15 modules as update software in the system structured as above is explained. The operation is explained in a case where updating software of each of the user computers 103 that the system operator formed into a LAN inside a company, as shown in FIG.5 and FIG.6.

20 [0077]

First of all, operation of the center computer 102 in the embodiment of the present invention is explained. FIG. 7 is a flow chart showing a process necessary for the center computer 102 to update the software.

25 [0078]

FIG.7A is a diagram showing a process of registering a new user in a center computer 102 for updating software

of each of the user computers 103 with the installation of  
update support tool 410. In this case, the center computer  
102 provides the system operator with a user ID for  
identifying him/her, and adds or updates data in each of  
5 the licensing table 205a, table 205b for locating modules  
to be obtained and table 205c for information on the module  
storing region.

[0079]

FIG. 7B is a flow chart showing a sequence of an action  
10 of the center computer 102 when it receives new modules for  
updating software from the software vendor. As shown in the  
diagram, the center computer 102, when it receives the new  
modules from the software vendors, the center computer 102  
designates the module storing regions 104 for the modules  
15 to be stored, for example, by having them relate by the names  
of the softwares and the like that received from the software  
vendors. The module is stored in the designated module  
storing region and the module list stored in the region is  
updated in the same time.

20 [0080]

Additionally, as explained above, each of the software  
vendors may access directly to the module storing regions  
104 to add the modules.

[0081]

25 FIG. 7C is a flow chart showing a sequence of an action  
of the user computer 103 when it is added with new software.  
When the user computer 103 is added with the new software,

the center computer 102 sets a new storing region 104 for storing modules for updating the software and stores the URL of the region into each of the table 205a, 205b and 205c in a manner to correspond to the user ID of the user computer 103 that is added with the new software.

[0082]

FIG. 8 is a flow chart showing a sequence of an action of the center computer 102 when the user computers 103 update the software.

10 [0083]

As shown in the diagram, first of all, the center computer 102 receives user ID from the user computer 103 for identifying the user computer (Step 501). The center computer 102 judges whether the user computer 103 has a license or not by referring to the license table 205a (Step 502). When judged that there is no license ("NO" in Step 503), the center computer 102 sends an error message to the user computer 103 (Step 508).

[0084]

20 When judged that there is a license ("YES" in Step 503), the center computer 102 searches for module storing regions 104 that correspond to the user ID by referring to the table 205b for locating modules to be obtained (Step 504). Then the center computer 102 lists up the module storing regions that corresponds to the user ID and adds URL of the module storing regions to the list (Step 505). This adding process is repeated for a number of times as the number of module

25

storing regions that correspond to the user ID ("NO" in the Step 506). When URLs for all of the corresponding modules are added ("YES" in Step 506), the list is stored in the data storing portion 205 so that the user computer 103 is  
5 capable of referring thereto (Step 507). In other words, the center computer 102 stores the list of the module storing regions into the data storing portion 205 so that the user computer 103 that accesses the data storing portion 205 can obtain the list of the module storing region. Further, the  
10 list of module storing regions includes information on types of module storing regions and unlocking key for unlocking the module storing region 104 in a case it is locked.  
[0085]

Next, operation of the user computer 103a is explained.  
15 FIG.9, FIG.10, FIG.11, FIG.12 and FIG.13 are flow charts showing a sequence of an action necessary for the user computer 103a to update its software.  
[0086]

As shown in FIG.9, the update support tool 410 of the  
20 user computer 103a, when it is started up, first of all, judges the purpose for being started up (Step 601). When it is started up for the purpose of checking for the modules to be updated (Step 601), the update support tool 410, for example, makes update operation managing screen to be  
25 displayed and have the system manager operate the operating portion 405 and send its own user ID to the center computer 102 through the network 101 (Step 602). In addition, in the



case where the user computer 103 is not started up for the purpose of checking for the modules to be updated in Step 601 is explained in the flow chart [1] of FIG. 13.

[0087]

5           Then the user computer 103 receives a status as a result of sending the user ID from the center computer 102 (Step 603). In a case such that the user computer 103a is not licensed, which means when the status is "error", the update support tool 410 sends the error status to the API412  
10           (Step 605).

[0088]

          When the status is not "error" (Step 604), the process proceeds to the flow chart [2] and the update support tool 410 judges whether there were any link machines that are  
15           to be started up linking with the user computer 103a.

[0089]

          Additionally, a link machine to be started up linking with the user computer 103a is previously set by inputting the IP address and the like of such user computers using  
20           the screen displayed by the software support tool 410. The set data is stored in the data storing portion 408 as an IP address of the link machine. Judgment to whether there are any link machines to be started up linking with the user computer 103a is made by checking on whether the user  
25           computer is capable of communicating with the IP address written as the IP address of the link machines.

[0090]

When there is a link machine that starts up linking with the user computer 103a ("YES" in Step 606), the update support tool 410 sends out a start up message to the link machines, in other words, a message to have the link machines obtain the module from the module storing region 104 as in the user computer 103a (Step 607). The sending out of the message is repeated to all of the link machines that are started up linking with the user computer 103a ("NO" in Step 608) and when the start up message is sent to all of the link machines ("YES" in Step 608) the process of the update support tool 410 proceeds to flow chart [3] of FIG.10. Meanwhile, when there are no link machines to be started up linking with the user computer 103a ("NO" in Step 606), the process of the update support tool 410 simply proceeds to [3] in flow chart.

[0091]

Then as shown in flow chart [3] of FIG.10, the update support tool 410 accesses to the center computer 102 through the network 101, and obtains the list of module storing regions by referring to the data storing portion 205 (Step 609). After that, the user computer 103a accesses to the module storing regions 104 by referring to the URL of the module storing region contained in the received list of module storing region. When the module storing region 104 is locked at the time of the access ("YES" in Step 611), the update support tool 410 unlocks the lock using the unlocking keys contained in the list of module storing

regions (Step 612) and obtains the module list 301 stored in the module storing region 104. When it is not locked, the module list 301 is simply obtained.

[0092]

5           Next, the update support tool 410 judges whether or not the module list 301 of the obtained module storing region 104 corresponds to the skipped module based on the information on types (Step 614). The region corresponding to the skipped module means, in concrete, whether or not  
10   installation of the modules can be cancelled based on the name of the skipped module stored in the data storing portion 408. When the module storing region 104 corresponds to the skipped module, the user computer 103a cancels the obtaining of the skipped modules. After the obtaining of the skipped  
15   module is cancelled, for example, when the software vendors confirmed that the module has no problems as a result of the performed operation check, the user computer 103a can obtain the cancelled module as the software vendor stores module to other module storing regions 104.

20   [0093]

          When the region corresponds to the skipped module ("YES" in Step 614), the skipped module is deleted from the obtained module list 301 (Step 615). Meanwhile, when the region does not correspond to the skipped module, the update  
25   support tool 410 judges whether the type of module storing region is for added modules or for changed modules based on the information on types of modules (Step 616). When the

type of region is for added modules ("YES" in Step 616),  
the modules mentioned in the module list 301 is added to  
the list of added modules (Step 618). When the type of region  
is for changed modules ("NO" in Step 616), the module is  
5 added to the list of changed modules (Step 617). Then the  
process is repeated until the update support tool 410  
accesses to all of the module storing regions 104 mentioned  
on the list of module storing regions ("NO" in Step 619)  
and when it accesses to all of the regions ("YES" in Step  
10 619), the process is proceeded to flow chart [4] of FIG.  
11.

[0094]

Meanwhile, in the embodiment of the present invention,  
when the list of modules and modules currently being  
15 installed in the user computer 103a is compared, a list of  
new version of modules (version that is changed) is called  
a list of changed modules to be obtained, and a list of  
modules that does not currently installed in the user  
computer 103a is called a list of added modules to be  
20 obtained.

[0095]

As shown in the flow chart [4] of FIG.11, first of all,  
the update support tool 410 judges whether or not there is  
already a list of changed modules to be obtained in the user  
25 computer 103a (Step 620). In a case where there is a list  
of changed modules to be obtained means that a list used  
when the update support tool 410 changed the modules in the

past still remained. When there exist the list ("YES" in Step 620), the list is initialized (Step 621) and when there is no such list, the list of changed modules to be obtained is newly formed (Step 622).

5 [0096]

Similarly, when there is already a list for the added modules to be obtained ("YES" in Step 623), the list is initialized (Step 624) and when there is no such list, the list of added modules to be obtained is newly formed (Step 625).

10

[0097]

Namely, when a module newer than the modules in the user computer 103a is on the list of changed modules ("YES" in Step 626), the name of such modules is added to the list of changed modules to be obtained (Step 627). When a module on the list of added modules does not exist in the user computer 103a ("YES" in Step 628), the module is added to the list of added modules to be obtained (Step 629).

15

[0098]

20

The operation described above is performed for all of the modules mentioned in the list of changed modules and the list of added modules. When both of the list of changed modules to be obtained and the list of added modules to be obtained are completed, the update support tool 410 proceeds to flow chart [5] of FIG. 12 after sending a status to API412 that there is modules that the user computer 103a should obtain (Step 630). However, when there are no modules needs

25

to be obtained, the update support tool 410 sends out such status to the API412 and displays as such on the monitor 406.

[0099]

5           Next, as shown in the flow chart [5] of FIG.12, the update support tool 410 cause the list of changed modules to be obtained or list of added modules to be obtained displayed on the monitor 406 (Step 631) and have the system operator choose among the choices of "obtaining the modules  
10 immediately", "setting a timer for obtaining the modules" or "not obtaining the updates at all" using, for example, a GUI buttons and the like.

[0100]

15           In a case where the timer is set, the update support tool 410 have the monitor 406 display a screen for setting the timer and have the system operator inputs date and time. When the system operator chooses "obtaining the modules immediately" or when the hours reached to the date and time set for the timer ("YES" in Step 634), the update support  
20 tool 410 accesses to the module storing region that stores the changed modules to be obtained based on the list of changed modules to be obtained, using the URL of such module storing regions (Step 635) and updates the modules (Step 636). The update support tool 410 also accesses to the  
25 module storing region that stores added modules to be obtained based on the list of added modules to be obtained (Step 638) and obtains such added modules to be obtained

and install the obtained modules (Step 639). Then, as the update support tool 410 sends status that the obtaining the modules are completed to the API (Step 639), the update module obtaining process of the user computer 103a is completed.

[0101]

Further, when the update support tool 410 sends message to start up other user computers linking with the user computer 103a, the other user computers do not obtain the modules from the user computer 103a but obtains the module by accessing to the modules storing regions 104 by themselves in the same way as the user computer 103a while the user computer 103a playing a role as a trigger.

Therefore, the load on the user computer 103a as a master machine can be minimized compared to the case where the user computer 103a sending the modules obtained to each of the other link machines.

[0102]

Meanwhile, as in Step 601 in FIG.9, in a case where the update support tool being started up for reasons other than checking for the modules need to be obtained means, as shown in FIG.13, for example, when the user computer 103a itself is started up based on the message from the user computers 103b and 103c to start up linking with the user computers 103b and 103c. In such case, the user computer 103a repeats the process indicated in the flow chart as [3], [4] and [5].

[0103]

With this configuration, the user computer 103a is able to play a role as a trigger and have the other user computers 103b, 103c etc started up linking with the user computer 103a. In the same time, the user computer 103a is able to receive the message to start up linking from the other user computers linked as a link machine and obtain the modules in the same way as the other user computers do.

[0104]

As explained above, according to the present invention, the center computer 102 is only to maintain the module storing regions 104 according to the user IDs and the URLs of the module storing regions and inform the user computer 103a of their URLs to have the softwares installed in the user computer 103a updated quite easily. Also, the user computer 103a is only to send out the user ID to the center computer to obtain the location information of the module storing regions 104 that stores modules to be obtained, therefore, is able to update its installed softwares quite easily without relying on the process of the center computer 102.

[0105]

Furthermore, the software vendors are only to rely on the center computer 102 to have their modules stored in the module storing regions 104. Then the update modules can be provided to the users quite easily by the process of the center computer 102 and the user computer 103a.



[0106]

In addition, the exchange of data between the center computer 102 and the user computer 103, the user computer 103 and the module storing regions 104 can be limited as  
5 the lowest number of times as possible, namely, once or twice respectively, traffic congestions or delays in the network can be minimized.

[0107]

However, the embodiments of the present invention is  
10 not limited to the embodiments described above but can be varied within the scope of the present invention.

[0108]

For example, in the embodiments described above, the user (system operator) himself starts up the update support  
15 tool 410, however, the update support tool may be started up automatically on a regular basis by setting a timer. Also, for example, the center computer 102 may cause the update support tool 410 to start up.

[0109]

20 Furthermore, in the above described embodiments, the center computer 102 may send a message to inform the user computer 103 every time modules are added to the module storing regions 104 and the update support tool 410 may be started up on receiving the message.

25 [0110]

Additionally, in the above described embodiment, an example of listing a name of modules as "skipped modules"

presuming that there may be a case where there are modules that have a negative effect on the other softwrares installed by the user, namely, the operation of the other softwares become unstable, is listed up as skipped modules in the data storing portion 408 and canceling the installation of such modules based on the names of the skipped modules has been explained. However, it is very difficult for the vendors to predict every module that may have negative effect on other software and there may be a case where installation of modules causing a negative effect on the other software used by the user even for the modules that are not listed as "skipped modules".

[0111]

For this reason, the system according to the present invention may possess a function to put the software back to a state before being updated.

[0112]

In other words, before the user computer 103 obtains the modules, information on previous version of the module and the information on URL of the storing region of the module is previously stored, and in a case where such problem occurred after the obtaining, the previous version of the module can be obtained as a new module to be updated based on the stored information.

[0113]

Since the update support tool 410 stores history information of access to the module storing region 104 last

time when it obtained a module, the information on the version of the modules of the software that currently being used and the URL of storing regions of the modules can be stored based on the information. By storing such  
5 information before updating the software, the software can be restored to its previous state even after updating thereof by obtaining the previous version of modules based on the information. Furthermore, the operation for this case may be in such form that providing a button shown as a GUI on  
10 the monitor 406 for "restoring to a state before the update" command and the user presses down the button by the operating portion 405.

[0114]

In addition, in the embodiment described above, the  
15 user chooses on the monitor 406 among the choices of "obtaining the modules immediately", "setting a timer for obtaining the modules" or "not obtaining the updates at all" after the list of changed modules to be obtained or the list of added modules to be obtained is being made. However,  
20 since the module storing region 104 may be added with new modules of all kinds of software vendors any time, for example, when user sets a timer, there may be a case where the new version of modules for the software used by the user may be added between a time period when the list of modules  
25 to changed modules to be obtained or the list of added modules to be obtained is formed and the time set for obtaining the software. In addition, apart from the case of setting a

timer, when the user does not do any operation on the monitor  
406 after having formed a list of changed modules to be  
obtained or the list of added modules to be obtained, there  
may be a possibility that a new module may be added to the  
5 storing region until the time when he/she obtains the module  
by choosing a command "obtain the modules immediately". In  
such case, when the software is obtained based on such list  
of changed modules to be obtained or the list of added modules  
to be obtained, the newly added modules cannot be obtained.  
10 This leaves the user not being able to obtain the newly added  
modules until the next time he/she performs update operation  
which is inconvenient for the user who wishes to use the  
latest version of the software all the time.  
[0115]

15 Therefore, according to the present invention, the  
list of changed modules to be obtained or the list of added  
modules to be obtained can be re-formed when the user chooses  
"obtain the modules immediately" command or when the timer  
reaches the set time as the user computer accessing the  
20 module storing regions 104 again, and modules can be  
re-obtained based on the re-formed list of modules.  
[0116]

FIG.14 is a flow chart explaining such operation.  
According to the diagram, operation as in FIG.12 is repeated  
25 and the list of changed modules to be obtained or the list  
of added modules to be obtained is re-formed after pressing  
the "obtain the modules immediately" or "setting a timing

of obtaining thereof with a timer" command (Step 701).

[0117]

With this configuration, the list of changed modules to be obtained or the list of added modules to be obtained is re-formed when actually obtaining the modules after forming the list of changed modules to be obtained or list of added modules to be obtained, for example, the modules that are added by the time of actual obtaining the modules as in a case where a module is added between a time period from the list of changed modules to be obtained or added modules to be obtained is formed and the time set by the timer can be obtained. This enables the real time, complete update.

[0118]

In addition, in the above described embodiment, a topology that each of the user computers are connected with each other through LAN is explained, however, the embodiment of this invention is not limited to this type. For example, each of the user computers is capable of being started up linking with other computers even when the user computers are connected with each other through the internet.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

[0119]

As explained above, according to the present invention, the software can be updated easily and efficiently and in the same time the load imposed on the information processing apparatus on the user side, the software vendors and the

center computer side can be reduced.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0120]

FIG. 1 is a sectional view showing overall structure  
5 of a container according to an embodiment of the present  
invention;

FIG. 2 is a diagram showing a structure of the center  
computer 102.

FIG. 3 is a diagram showing the contents of the  
10 licensing table 205a, the table 205b containing location  
information of update softwares and the table 205c of the  
information on the storing region of the modules.

FIG. 4 is a diagram showing a structure of the module  
storing regions 104.

15 FIG. 5 is a diagram showing a structure of the user  
computers 103.

FIG. 6 is a diagram showing a structure of the software  
stored in the software storing portion 407 and detailed  
structure of the data storing portion 408.

20 FIG. 7 is a flow chart showing a process necessary for  
the center computer 102 to update the software.

FIG. 8 is a flow chart showing a sequence of an action  
of the center computer 102 when the user computers 103  
updates the software.

25 FIG. 9 is a flow chart showing a sequence of an action  
necessary for the user computers 103 to update the software.

FIG. 10 is a flow chart continued from FIG. 9.

FIG. 11 is a flow chart continued from FIG.10.

FIG. 12 is a flow chart continued from FIG.11.

FIG. 13 is a flow chart showing a sequence of process  
when the user computer is started up triggered by another  
5 computer.

FIG. 14 is a flow chart showing a sequence of process  
when the update / additional module list is to be re-formed.

#### EXPLANATION OF CODES

[0121]

10	102	Center computer
	103	User computer
	104	Module storing region
	205a	Licensing table
	205b	Table for locating modules to be obtained
15	205c	Table for information on module storing region
	301	List of modules
	406	Monitor
	410	Update support tool